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WHERE THE CLIMATE FOR BUSINESS IS PERFECT

## Eagles and Ag Brings Visitors, Builds Awareness for Carson Valley

By Kurt Hildebrand

Pick a sunny day in late February and chances are someone will be standing along a fence line looking out over Carson Valley's open fields with a pair of binoculars or a big camera.

Those people aren't enjoying the scenery or trying to capture a cow giving birth.

Their interest lies in what's attracted by what's left over from the birth.

Eagles.

Chances of spotting an eagle in Northern Nevada are pretty slim any other time of year.

But during calving season in the last weeks of winter, the big birds of prey turn out to feed, and people turn out to see the once endangered national bird.

This eight-year event does more than just bring out bird watchers; it helps feed the economy with visitors coming from all over the U.S. to see these magnificent birds of prey in their natural habit – an opportunity that provides a boost in visitor spending.

In 2000, rancher Arnold Settlemeyer told the story about someone who climbed a fence to try and get a better look. Bothering the cows didn't improve the tourist's view, but it did prompt ranchers and their supporters to come up with a way to corral the tourists.

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Educator Steve Lewis said representatives from the Western Nevada Resource Conservation & Development District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Carson Valley Conservation District, and local ranchers met in 2003 to discuss an event to promote agriculture.

Besides keeping their property safe from random visitors, ranchers felt they constantly had to defend themselves from an increasingly urban population.

Lewis points out the population of the county has almost doubled in the last 20 years.

"The agriculture community found themselves spending more time in meetings defending the agricultural industry," he said. "No one wants agriculture to leave however, as we grow, agriculture is pushed away."

More importantly, it was understood that agriculture is a key economic development driver that helps to fuel a community and region with its production output.

Eagles provided an answer and a way for agriculture to really showcase how it works, the benefits in the natural cycle and provide for education about the industry.

"The presence of bald eagles during calving had inspired the RC&D coordinator to take small groups of people out on farms and ranches to get a closer look," Lewis said.

The tour was established in 2003, with the help of Valley ranchers, the Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce, the American Land Conservancy, the Smallwood Foundation, the Cooperative Extension, Western Nevada Resource Conservation and Development.

Lewis estimated that there have been roughly 4,000 actual participants in Eagles and Agriculture in its eight years.



Above: Pat and John King of Washoe Valley watch an eagle at Mack Land & Cattle during a previous Eagles & Agriculture event. This year's Eagles & Ag event February 25th - 27th. Information and schedule of events at [www.visitcarsonvalley.org](http://www.visitcarsonvalley.org) or 782-8144.

Right: A bald eagle sits on a fence at Heise Land & Livestock on Highway 88 last February.

He said there never seems to be enough information.

"The appetite for additional information sharing is strong and realized by the public, local media and the agriculture community," he said.

The event has prompted ranchers to come up with other ways to use people's interest in agriculture and leverage the economic boost to the Valley.

Lewis said one ranch started an antique business and conducts historical tours. Others have begun work on locally grown meat and produce.

"Ranchers have learned that the public wants to support local agriculture and purchase locally grown meat and produce," he said. "As a result, a niche livestock marketing group was formed to investigate the feasibility of a slaughter and processing facility."

Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce Director Bill Chernock said the event generates about 110 room nights and a direct expenditure of at least \$50,000 from the 250 or so registered participants. There's a lot to be said for the impact of agriculture and economic development in spurring growth for the region long-term.

"We also believe that a number of additional people visit the Valley around the time of the event because they know the probability of sightings is high," he said. "The greatest impact is in the press exposure generated by the ramp up to the event and the publicity that it generates that places Carson Valley as a unique area in its blending of agriculture, tourism, recreation,

scenic beauty and affordability. We also believe that the event has brought a number of people to Carson Valley as first time visitors who have since made additional trips here."

Chernock said the event's success is due to the many different groups that come together to support the event.

"The many agencies and groups that cooperate to deliver their areas of expertise in presenting the event, the willingness of Carson Valley ranchers to allow attendees access to their property, the birding, history and photography experts that volunteer their time to serve as guides, the relative scarceness of opportunities to reliably view bald eagles and the overall attractiveness of the area," he said. "In total it produces a combination of the elements of agriculture, wildlife, and scenic beauty that is difficult to match."

Chernock said lessons that can be taken away from Eagles and Agriculture include building a quality organizing group and something more.

"Moreover, it requires a commitment to providing an exceptional experience, and creating an event that is honestly tied to the attributes of the Carson Valley," he said.

The benefits from an economic development standpoint have been numerous as well.

"As the Northern Nevada Development Authority (NNDA) continues to develop and actively seek business expansion and relocation opportunities and the Douglas County Economic Vitality Plan is underway, events such as this showcase the region for its unique attributes," said Rob Hooper, NNDA executive



Shannon Litz/R-C file photos

director. "Ranchers, farmers and potential distributors see how the region embraces the agriculture and that there is strong support locally, and frankly that goes a long way in business."

The 2011 Eagles & Agriculture event will be held February 25th - 27th. Complete event information can be found at [www.visitcarsonvalley.org](http://www.visitcarsonvalley.org).

For information about NNDA, call (775) 883-4413 or email [nnda@nnda.org](mailto:nnda@nnda.org).

